



May 4, 2017

Representative Justin Parish
120 4th Street, State Capitol Room 432
Juneau, AK. 99807-1182

Dear Representative Parish,

The Mat-Su Health Foundation shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center and invests its profits from that partnership back into the community to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in the Mat-Su.

I am writing today to express support for House Joint Resolution 20, Urging the United States Congress and the President of the United States to maintain health coverage for individuals currently covered by Medicaid expansion.

We supported Medicaid expansion in order to increase access to behavioral health and primary care for more Alaskans, and it has worked. Medicaid expansion has improved access to healthcare and preventive services to help people stay healthy, manage chronic diseases, and prevent unnecessary hospitalizations. Access to healthcare services in a timely way translates to healthier individuals, a stronger workforce and improved economic prospects for families. And, it saves lives! Mortality rates in expansion states have declined compared to non-expansion states. Medicaid expansion even helps low income older adults have access to affordable healthcare as they wait for Medicare benefits—so they will be healthier going onto Medicare when they turn 65.

Thanks to Medicaid expansion, more people now have access to care upstream for behavioral and other health issues and this helps prevent costly emergency department visits. Access to health care and mental health care in a timely way and in the appropriate setting improves health outcomes for people and helps control costs for all populations, not just those who will gain access to Medicaid. Here in the Mat-Su, a clear example of how expansion benefits us can be drawn from the Emergency Department at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, which sees five times the number of people with behavioral health issues than our community mental health center. The Mat-Su population nearly doubled from 50,000 people to 98,000 people since 2000 but Mat-Su's community mental health center grants from the Department of Behavioral Health stayed flat. State funding mechanisms for this safety net population literally drove people to seek care in the ED instead of in lower cost settings. These folks delayed care until it was a crisis and presented to the ED. With Medicaid coverage, a portion of these individuals could get care sooner, before a crisis occurs, and in a lower-cost setting.

Medicaid expansion has brought needed care to more than 2,000 Mat-Su residents and almost 30,000 Alaskans. It has also directly and positively impacted the availability of treatment for alcohol and substance abuse, which were ranked by Mat-Su residents as the most pressing health issues in the Borough. Medicaid expansion provides critical behavioral health treatment that addresses root causes rather than allowing problems to escalate to more expensive treatment settings. At the same time, it has brought more than \$352 million in federal funding into Alaska. Further, 82,000 Alaska children rely on Medicaid and Denali KidCare to get the care they need to be healthy. We feel it is absolutely critical that coverage be maintained for all who are currently covered by Medicaid.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Ripley".

Chief Executive Officer